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Airport security improvements suggested

Robert Mullins

Airports should improve security by using biometric identification of employees, improved video monitoring and better airport communications, all while mindful of the rights of passengers, a new Silicon Valley task force report says.

The Silicon Valley Blue Ribbon Task Force on Aviation Security and Technology, established by U.S. Rep. Mike Honda and San Jose Mayor Ron Gonzales, released its recommendations Monday. It was formed after the terrorist attacks on America of Sept. 11, 2001, to see how Silicon Valley technology can better protect airports.

The panel recommends that airports consider using biometric technology to verify the identity of airport and airline personnel before being admitted to secure areas. Biometrics technology identifies a person by unique biological characteristics such as fingerprints or retinal scans.

The panel also recommends that airports use video monitoring systems to watch over various parts of the airport for suspicious activity. It also calls for integrating the communications systems of airports and airlines into one digital network.

While calling for enhanced security, the task force wants to protect passenger rights. In the wake of Sept. 11, airports have had trouble balancing security with passenger convenience. Long lines have tested nerves and some passengers have complained they were unfairly singled out for searches and detainment.

The task force is chaired by John Thompson, chief executive officer of Symantec Corp., a computer security firm based in Cupertino.

In the Sept. 11 attacks, terrorists slipped through lax security at airports and hijacked the planes they crashed into the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. An estimated 3,000 people were killed in the attacks.

"Following the events of September 11, it was apparent that aviation security could be substantially improved," says Mr. Honda, a Democrat from San Jose.

The task force recommendations are being forwarded to Norman Mineta, the former mayor of San Jose and now secretary of transportation in the Bush administration.



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